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Alternative to 'Victory' in Afghanistan?

By William Pfaff

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PARIS — *The Nation* magazine's Robert Dreyfuss has just published a [fascinating account](#) of Washington establishment opinion about the war in Afghanistan.

The four speakers at a Brookings Institution discussion were Bruce Riedel, adviser to the president (and believer in the catastrophic international consequences of a loss of the war in Afghanistan); Michael O'Hanlon, an adviser to Gen. David Petraeus; Tony Cordesman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies; and Kim Kagan, head of the Institute for the Study of War.

The unanimous gloom expressed by these four speakers, and the apparent absence of any sunlight shining from the attending (and largely professional-political) audience, seems clear confirmation that Barack Obama and his chosen advisers have wasted no time in placing themselves and the country — in a mere five months — into the same desperate situation that it took the combined Johnson and Nixon administrations 15 years to arrive at in the case of Vietnam. This view would seem widely shared today — without influencing policy.

This is scarcely believable. Dreyfuss summarizes the speakers' shared views: 1. "Significant escalation" is essential "to avoid utter defeat." 2. If "tens of thousands" of new troops were sent to Afghanistan, it would be impossible to know whether this reinforcement changed anything until another 18 months had elapsed. 3. Even if the U.S. "turns the tide," no "significant drawdown" of American troops could occur for at least another five years.

However, the most dramatic unanimous opinion of the four experts was this one: "There is no alternative to victory."

Where have we heard that before? From Douglas MacArthur, speaking to Congress on April 19, 1951, almost six months to a day after his combined U.S., R.O.K. and U.N. army's drive to the Yalu River was defeated by China's intervention in the Korean war. The Communists' complete re-conquest of North Korea followed.

Two months after MacArthur spoke, the United States renounced the military objective of reunifying Korea and expressed interest in an armistice roughly along the 38th parallel, the prewar border. That was the alternative to American victory.

In Vietnam, the alternative to victory was the 1973 subterfuge of "Vietnamization" of the war, with withdrawal of the last American troops in March of that year. Saigon fell on April 30, 1975.

Why is there no alternative to American victory in what the president calls "AfPak"?

When President Obama took office he might have said that the Bush administration had made a dreadful mess of Afghanistan, but that he was resolved to save America, NATO and Afghanistan itself from this Bush-era folly. He intended to put the U.S. on a new track toward peace and reconciliation with the 40 million Pashtuns of Central Asia — who provide the potential recruiting pool for the angry young men of the Taliban.

He could also have said that it makes no real difference to the United States whether the Taliban do or do not rule Afghanistan, or whether Osama bin Laden is or is not in that country. Afghanistan is on the other side of the world, surrounded by tough people who can look after themselves. Terrorists do not need "safe havens" in Afghanistan. The world is full of empty "safe havens." The terrorists are being defeated by policemen and security forces in all of the Western countries, while Osama bin Laden periodically releases videos to Arab television.

The people of Afghanistan have themselves defended their country against all foreign interference since the time of Alexander the Great. It wasn't the U.S. or NATO that defended them. They did it themselves — as an energetic minority of them are doing now — but, unhappily, against U.S. and NATO interference in their country.

The Afghans have already experienced Taliban rule, from 1996 until the U.S. invasion in 2001. A great many of them did not like it. If they don't want the Taliban, with their obscurantism, oppression of women and brutal interpretations of Islamic law, to come back again and install their despotic rule, let the Afghan people defend themselves. The U.S./NATO intervention simply gets in the way. As a foreigners' invasion, it is objectively a source of support for the Taliban.

Instead of reading ecology and novels on his vacation, the president should read Charles de Gaulle. He ended the dreadful insurrection in Algeria that brought him back to power in

France in 1958. And Algeria was legally a part of France itself, possessing energy resources that could have made France energy self-sufficient, and it had a large colonial population that wanted Algeria forever French.

So did a part of the French army. A conspiracy of officers tried to assassinate de Gaulle and overthrow his government. This wasn't a puerile problem of armed bullies shouting abuse at congressmen.

De Gaulle ordered peace negotiations, stopped the war, brought the colonists and the army home, and turned to rebuilding France after its generations of crisis.

Please, President Obama: Take a lesson in success. Don't kill tens, or hundreds, of thousands more people in still another search for a useless American victory that ends in defeat, and ruins your presidency.